

Flanders Field American Cemetery and Memorial

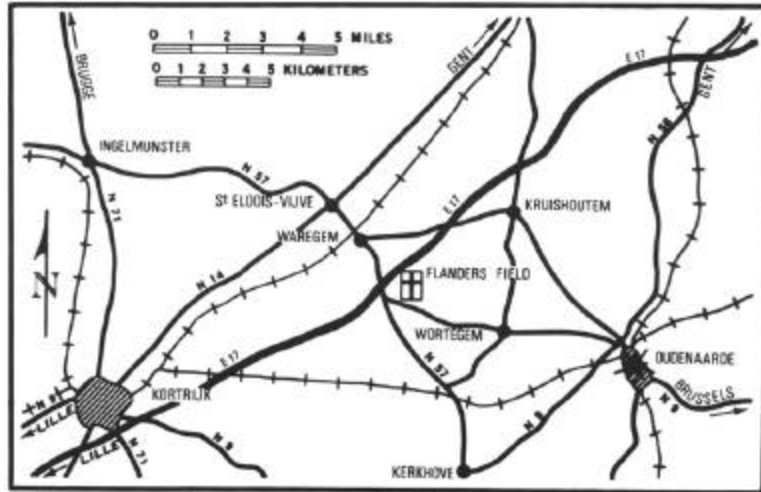


The American Battle Monuments Commission



Chapel Interior

Flanders Field American Cemetery and Memorial



LOCATION

Flanders Field American Cemetery and Memorial is located on the southeastern edge of the industrial commune of Waregem, Belgium, about 1.5 miles/2.5 kms from the center of town, on the road to Oudenaarde (Audenarde).¹

Waregem may be reached by train from Brussels via Gent (Gand) in approximately one hour, from Paris, Gare du Nord in about five hours via Rysel (Lille) and Kortrijk (Courtrai), and five and one-half hours via Brussels and Gent. Taxi service is available from the train station in Waregem. Road distances to Waregem from various cities are: Brussels – 55 miles/88 kms, Mons – 50 miles/80 kms, Gent – 21 miles/34 kms, Brugge (Bruges) – 29 miles/47 kms, Kortrijk (Courtrai) – 10 miles/16 kms, Oudenaarde (Audenarde) – 8 miles/13 kms, Ieper (Ypres) – 28 miles/45 kms, Rysel (Lille) – 29 miles/47 kms, and Paris – 175 miles/280 kms.

Adequate hotel accommodation may be found in Waregem and in most of the surrounding cities and towns.

1. Parenthetical references show French spelling.

HOURS

The cemetery is open daily to the public from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm except December 25 and January 1. It is open on host country holidays. When the cemetery is open to the public, a staff member is on duty in the Visitors' Building to answer questions and escort relatives to grave and memorial sites.



Entrance Gate

HISTORY

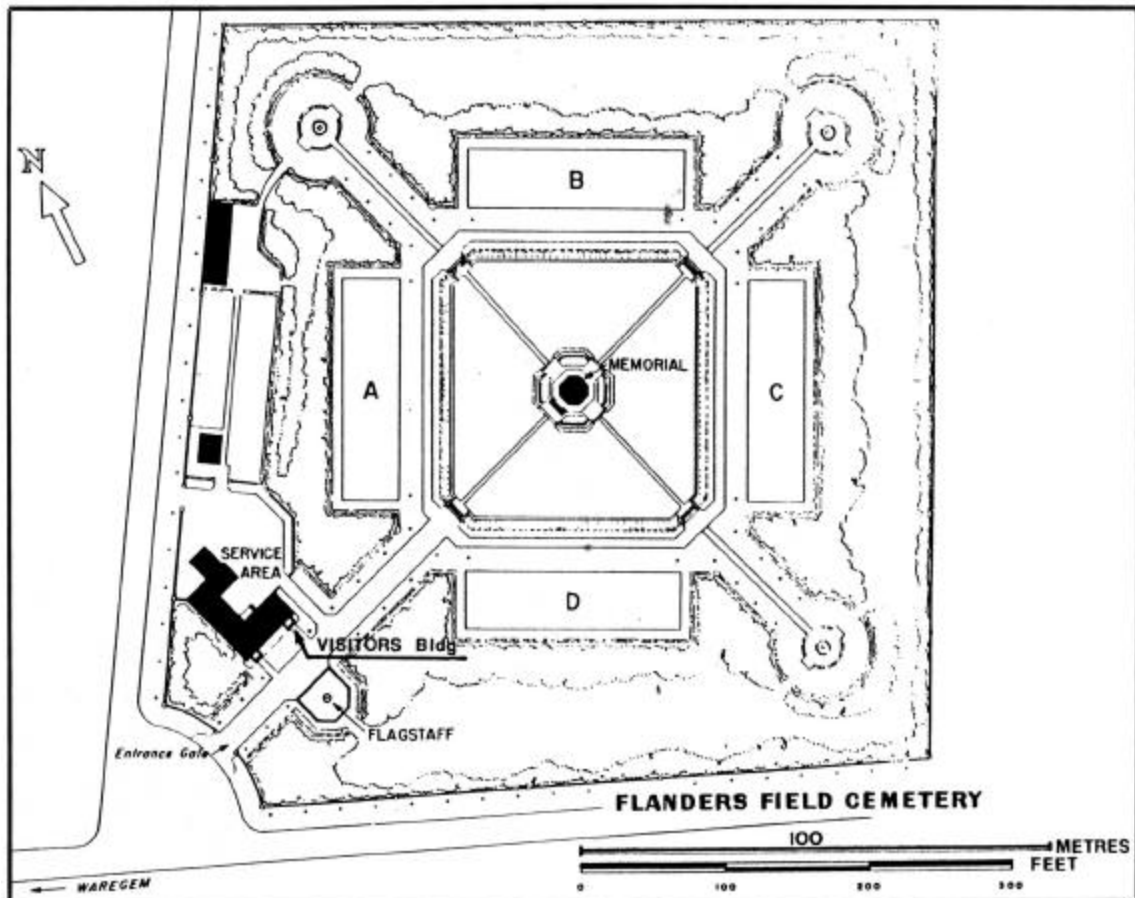
The Flanders Field American Cemetery is situated on a battlefield where the U.S. 91st Division suffered many casualties in securing the wooded area called “Spitaals Bosschen” a few hundreds yards to its east.

Before advancing into Belgium, the U.S. 91st and U.S. 37th Divisions had been engaged in heavy fighting in the Meuse-Argonne region. both divisions received orders in October 1918 to join the French Army in Belgium and assist in the operations launched there on 28 September 1918 by the Group of Armies of Flanders under the command of Albert I, King of Belgium.

The two divisions join the Ypres-Lys offensive on 30 October: the U.S. 37th along the railroad at Olsene, and the U.S. 91st just south of Waregem. A French division separated them in the lines when the general attack eastward toward the Escaut River (also known as the Schelde River) began at 5:30 a.m. on 31 October 1918.

The U.S. 91st Division quickly drove forward despite intense artillery and machine gun fire and captured the “Spitaals Bosschen” a short distance in front of its line of departure. The division was then delayed by severe enfilade fire from its right, as the French Division on that flank had been unable to make a corresponding advance. Meanwhile, under heavy enemy fire the U.S. 37th Division advanced about 2 ½ miles to the western outskirts of Cruyshautem (Kruishoutem) where it dug in for the night. The following day, it being evident that the Germans were retreating, both divisions advanced

rapidly to the Escaut River. The U.S. 91st occupied part of Audenarde on 2 November and the remainder of it the next day. Early on 2 November under heavy fire, the U.S. 37th Division forced a crossing of the Escaut southeast of Heurne. On 4 November, a German counterattack against the bridgehead was repulsed. Both divisions were relieved during the night of 4 November to prepare for another general offensive and returned to the front lines on 10 November. The following day, with little opposition, both divisions were able to advance. The Armistice became effective at 11:00 a.m. on that date (11 November 1918).



SITE

Smallest of the permanent American military cemeteries on the European continent, the Flanders Field American Cemetery occupies 6 acres. It was dedicated on 8 August 1937, and is the only American World War I cemetery in Belgium. The use of the land on which it rests has been granted by the Belgian Government free of charge or taxation in perpetuity, as an expression of its gratitude to the United States.

On 30 May 1927, Charles A. Lindberg flew over the cemetery in the *Spirit of St. Louis* to salute his fallen countrymen and drop poppies on the Memorial Day ceremonies being held below. He did this just 9 days after he completed his historic solo trans-Atlantic flight.

For many Americans, the cemetery has special significance because of John McCrae's poem, *In Flanders Field*. The poem, however, was not written about the fighting which occurred there. Lt. Col. John McCrae, M.D., a Canadian physician, wrote it while serving at a medical station in Ypres. On 8 December 1915, the poem was published anonymously in *Punch* magazine. Colonel McCrae died of pneumonia on 28 January 1918, nine months prior to large-scale fighting in the Flanders area. In 1919, his verses were collected and published under the title *In Flanders Field and Other Poems*.

IN FLANDERS FIELD

In Flanders fields, the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
 That mark our place; and in the sky
 The larks, still bravely singing, fly,
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
 Loved and were loved, and now we lie
 in Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
 The torch; Be yours to hold it high.
 If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
 in Flanders fields.

It was due to the poem "In Flanders Field" that Miss Moina Michael originated the Flanders Memorial Poppy which has raised millions of dollars for veterans and their families. Miss Michael became known to millions of World War I veterans as the "Poppy Lady" and on 9 November 1918 she wrote the poem, *We Shall Keep the Faith* in answer to the *In Flanders Field* poem.

WE SHALL KEEP THE FAITH

Oh! You who sleep in "Flanders Fields,"
 Sleep sweet – to rise anew!
 We caught the Torch you threw
And, holding high we keep the Faith.
 With all who died.

We cherish, too, the poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led:
 It seems to signal to the skies
 That blood of heroes never dies.
But lends a lustre to the red

Of the flower that blooms above the dead
In Flanders Fields.

And now the Torch and Poppy red
We wear in honor of our dead.
Fear not that ye have died for naught;
We've learned the lesson that ye taught
In Flanders Fields.



Garden with Decorative Urn

ARCHITECTS

Dr. Paul P. Cret of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was the architect of the cemetery and the memorial. The landscape architect was J. Greber of Paris, France.

GENERAL LAYOUT

From the wrought-iron entrance gates on the Waregem/Oudenaarde road, a short graveled lane bordered by linden trees on a carpet of grass leads past the Visitors' Building on the left and the flagpole terrace on the right to the memorial chapel and graves area beyond.

The American flag flies daily from the 50-foot flagpole on the terrace near the entrance gate. The pole's cast bronze base is ornamented with Acanthus leaves, butterflies, seashells, oak leaves and acorns with a circle of poppies at the point where the staff is inserted in the base. The flagpole was designed by Egerton Swartwout, New York City, New York and cast by Susse Freres, Paris, France. Other architectural ornaments in the cemetery were created by L. Bottiau of Paris, France.

Steps lead down from the end of the graveled lane directly to the corner of a square-shaped sunken garden in the center of which is a nondenominational chapel where visitors may pause for meditation and quiet reflection. Paralleling each side of the sunken garden is one of the cemetery's four rectangular grave plots. Flagstone paths lead from the chapel to steps at the three other corners of the sunken garden beyond which small secluded recesses enclosed with trees are located, each containing a decorative urn on a pedestal and stone benches on which to rest. The insignia of the four American divisions that fought in Belgium (27th, 30th, 37th and 91st) are shown on the urns in sculptured form.

MEMORIAL CHAPEL

At the center of the cemetery is the small memorial chapel of white Pouillenay stone. Above its bronze entrance door is engraved:

GREET THEM EVER WITH
GRATEFUL HEARTS

to remind the visitor that those buried there died for their freedom.

On three of the outer walls, the dedicatory inscription appears in French, Flemish and English.

THIS CHAPEL HAS BEEN ERECTED BY
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
IN MEMORY OF HER SOLDIERS
WHO FOUGHT AND DIED IN BELGIUM
DURING THE WORLD WAR.
THESE GRAVES ARE THE PERMANENT
AND VISIBLE SYMBOL OF THE HEROIC DEVOTION
WITH WHICH THEY GAVE THEIR LIVES
TO THE COMMON CAUSE OF HUMANITY.

Beneath the three versions for the inscription, sculptured bas-relief figures symbolizing Grief, Remembrance and History respectively appear.



CHAPEL INTERIOR

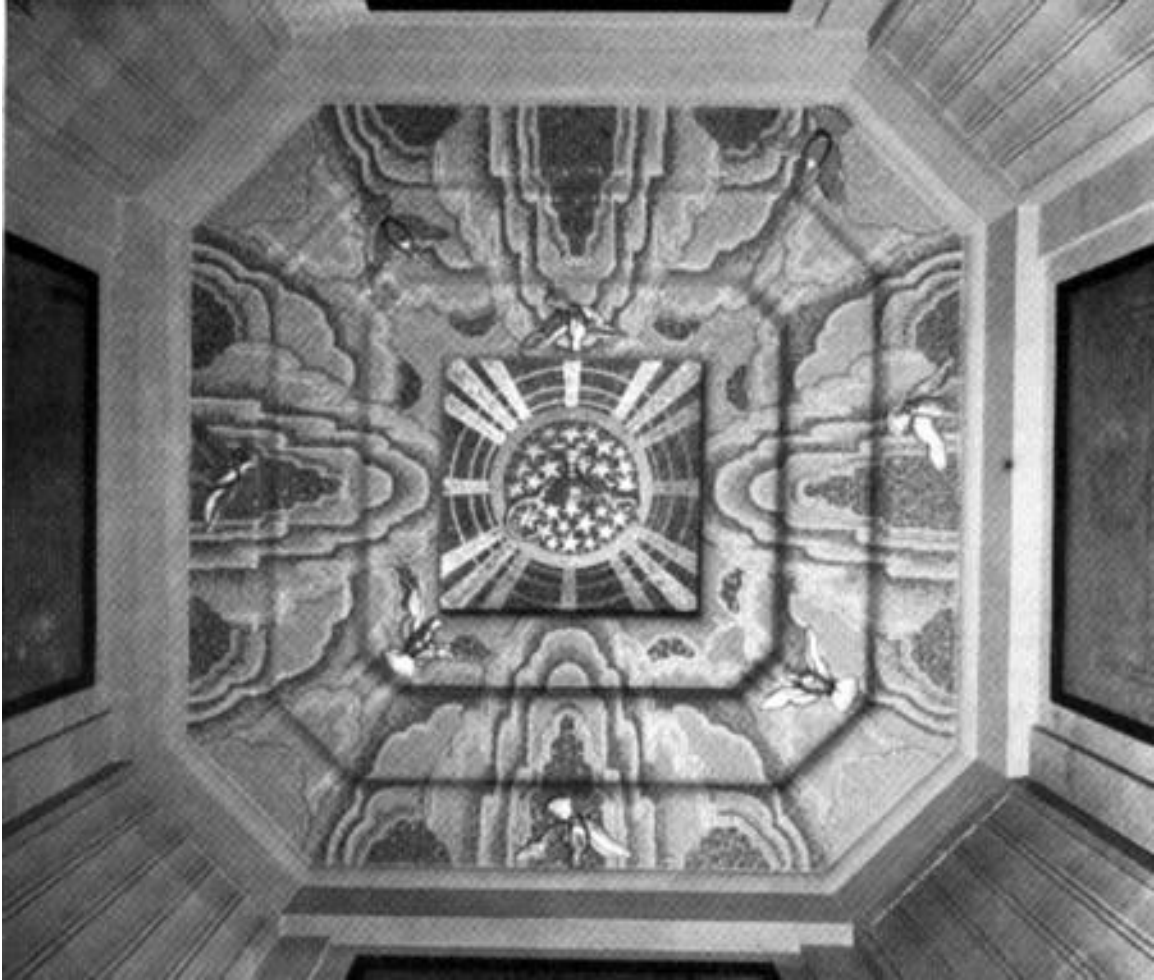
Inside the chapel, one's attention is drawn to the altar of Grand Antique (black and white) marble. On the front of the altar is inscribed:

I WILL RANSOM THEM FROM THE POWER OF THE GRAVE.
I WILL REDEEM THEM FROM DEATH (Hosea, XIII:14).

Above it, carved on a rose-tinted marble panel, is a Crusader's sword outline in gold. On either side of the altar stands a bronze candelabrum and flagstaffs supporting flags of the United States, Belgium, France, Great Britain and Italy. On the sidewalls of the chapel, panels of rose St. George marble enframed in bronze molding carry the names of 43 American soldiers who lost their lives in Belgium and sleep in unknown graves. Above the names is the Great Seal of the United States and the inscription:

IN MEMORY OF THOSE AMERICAN SOLDIERS
WHO FOUGHT IN THIS REGION AND
WHO SLEEP IN UNKNOWN GRAVES.

The beauty of the interior is enhanced by the mosaic ceiling, which depicts a lighted oil lamp under the stars of Heaven with doves of peace flying toward the light and, over the door, a large ornamental window through which comes a subdued golden light. The furniture of the chapel is of carved oak, stained black with veining in white to harmonize with the black and white marble altar.



Mosaic Ceiling in Chapel



Tablets of the Missing in Chapel



Memorial Chapel Surrounded by Graves

GRAVES AREA

The graves area consists of four rectangular plots. Each plot contains 92 graves marked with white marble headstones set in stately rows on a carpet of green grass. Stars of David mark the graves of those of Jewish faith and Latin Crosses mark all others. Each grave plot is enframed by an English yew hedge and dense massifs of colorful trees and shrubs. Twenty-one of the 368 graves in the cemetery is of Unknowns.

VISITORS' ROOM

Near the cemetery entrance a comfortably furnished room is provided where visitors may pause to refresh themselves or obtain information from the cemetery staff. A register is maintained there, and all visitors are encouraged to sign it before leaving the cemetery. Burial locations and sites of memorialization in all of the overseas American military cemeteries of both World War I and World War II, plus other information of interest concerning the overseas cemeteries or local history, may be obtained from the Superintendent or the cemetery staff.



Visitors' Building



Visitors' Room

PLANTINGS

Behind the linden trees bordering the lane, a currant hedge sets off dense massifs of trees and colorful shrubs of rhododendron, lilac, azalea, birch, ash, oak, elm, holly, maple, osmanthus, hydrangea, magnolia, spirea and Japanese prune.



Unknown Soldier of World War I

Audenarde Monument



In 1936, the American Battle Monuments Commission erected a small monument in Oudenaarde (Audenarde), Belgium, to the 40,000 American troops who participated in operations in that area during World War I. The monument of yellow Cruchaud stone is located in a small park at Tacambaro Place in the center of the city. It was designed by Harry Sternfeld of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

On the front of the monument above a sculptured shield of the United States is engraved the inscription:

37TH DIVISION – 91ST DIVISION – 53RD FIELD ARTILLERY BRIGADE.

Below the shield and flanked by two sculptured American eagles is the inscription:

ERECTED BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
TO COMMEMORATE THE SERVICES OF AMERICAN TROOPS
WHO FOUGHT IN THIS VICINITY, OCT 30 – NOV 11, 1918.

A French version of the inscription is repeated on the right side of the monument and a Flemish version on the left.

Kemmel Monument



In 1929, the American Battle Monuments Commission erected a small monument commemorating the achievements of the 27th and 30th Divisions which fought in the Ypress-Lys offensive with the British Army from 18 August to 4 September 1918. The monument of clear Rocheret stone is located near the hamlet of Vierstraat on the road to Kemmelberg (Mont Kemmel) about 4 miles/6.5 km south of Ieper (Ypres). It was designed by George Howe of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Engraved on the front of the monument is the inscription:

27TH DIVISION – 30TH DIVISION
ERECTED BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
TO COMMEMORATE THE SERVICES OF AMERICAN TROOPS
WHO FOUGHT IN THIS VICINITY
AUGUST 18-SEPTEMBER 4, 1918.

The inscription is flanked on either side by a sculptured American bayonet. Below the inscription is a sculptured American helmet resting upon a wreath. A French version of the inscription is engraved on the left side of the monument and a Flemish version on the right. The insignia of the 27th and 30th Divisions are engraved on the back side of the monument with their respective numerical designations beneath them.